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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000129

SENSITIVE  
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/03  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [DJ](#)  
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI POLITICAL UPDATE: REGIONAL GOVERNOR SHUFFLE; MORE  
SUPPORT FOR GUELLEH THIRD TERM

REF: 09 DJIBOUTI 1405; 09 DJIBOUTI 1417

CLASSIFIED BY: J. Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. In a rare shakeup, the national Council of Ministers named three new regional governors on January 26. Two of the three new appointees are from the same sub-clan as Aden Robleh Awaleh, the only ruling coalition partner to have publicly rejected a constitutional amendment allowing President Guelleh to run for a third term in office in 2011 (ref A). Beyond their ethnic ties, the new faces bring relative youth to the regional positions--not always an advantage in traditional Djiboutian culture, which tends to associate age with wisdom and youth with inexperience. Meanwhile the ethnic Afar-dominated FRUD ("Front for the Restoration of Democracy and Unity"), President Guelleh's most important coalition partner, has still yet to set a date for its party congress, and is reportedly deep in internal party negotiations over whether to support a third term for Guelleh, and what to ask for in return. While waiting for the FRUD, Guelleh picked up another endorsement for a constitutional amendment from a small coalition partner, bringing the count in the five-party grouping to three for, one against, and one (FRUD) undecided. END SUMMARY.

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ONE MORE COALITION PARTNER PUBLICLY  
SUPPORTS THIRD TERM FOR GUELLEH  
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12. (SBU) During an extraordinary party congress held January 20, the PSD ("Social Democratic Party") declared support for a constitutional amendment allowing President Guelleh to run for a third term in office in 2011. The PSD is a minor partner in Guelleh's five-party ruling UMP ("Union for a Presidential Majority") coalition. It currently seats party President Ahmed Boulaleh Barreh as its only deputy in the 65-seat National Assembly. A second seat has remained vacant since the 2009 death of late PSD President Moumin Bahdon Farah. President Guelleh's RPP ("Popular Rally for Progress") newspaper "Le Progres" featured prominent coverage of the PSD congress, including verbatim reproductions of PSD resolutions calling for a constitutional amendment and a third Guelleh candidacy.

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FRUD LEADERSHIP CONSULTS BASE  
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13. (C) The RPP's largest coalition partner--FRUD--is engaged in intensive internal consultations over its leaders' desire to support a constitutional amendment and third term for Guelleh, in exchange for an increased share of power and positions (ref B). Senior FRUD parliamentarian and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee Youssouf Moussa Dawaleh told Ambassador January 19 that he was confident the rank and file would agree--but, in the Djiboutian way, only after lengthy consultation. The FRUD party congress, planned for December, has been deferred until later in the spring to permit these discussions.

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OPPOSITION NEWSLETTER INCREASES CIRCULATION  
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14. (SBU) Aden Robleh Awaleh's PND ("National Democratic Party"), the only ruling coalition member so far to oppose a third term for Guelleh, continues to publish a bi-weekly newsletter. Demand from

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readership of "La Republique" is reportedly high enough that the editorial staff decided to double the number of copies produced, from 500 to 1000. The latest edition (January 28) features criticism of economic development projects perceived to be stalled (a long-rumored refinery, automobile and heavy equipment free zone, and international airport), and Awaleh's defense of his record as the "architect of Djiboutian independence."

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RULING RPP ALSO STILL CHURNING  
OVER THIRD TERM  
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15. (C) Two senior RPP ministers separately confirmed to Ambassador January 13 and January 25 that even within the ruling party there is still not full consensus on a third term for the President. Minister of Health Abdallah Abdillahi Miguil said there is considerable Issa dissent over plans for a third term, with minority Issak and Gadabursi more enthusiastic. He warned that pushing for Afar support could lead to a "rupture" within the FRUD, potentially putting the whole coalition at risk. He doubted that a referendum on a third term would pass, except perhaps through "fatalism."

16. (C) Minister of Interior Yacin Elmi Bouh, who is widely reported to be vying to replace Guelleh, did not speak of his personal plans but concurred that it could be difficult to secure a majority in a referendum on a third term. He said the RPP Central Committee has written to Guelleh to urge that any amendment be orchestrated through the National Assembly rather than a referendum. Bouh expected a meeting of the 150-person RPP Central Committee to be held in March and to clarify the President's position on the third term.

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REGIONAL GOVERNOR SHAKEUP COURTS KEY CONSTITUENCIES  
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¶7. (SBU) In a fairly rare shuffle of often long-serving regional officials, the Council of Ministers appointed three new regional Prefets on January 26. (NOTE. In Djibouti's French-influenced political system, each of the country's six administrative districts is overseen by a regional governor (Prefet). Prefets are appointed by the central government, and report directly to the Minister of the Interior. After Regional Councils were elected for the first time in 2006, Prefets transferred limited responsibilities--such as issuance of civil documents--to the new, locally-elected officials. However, the Prefets remain the undisputed authorities on most official matters, and are often acknowledged as final arbiters in informal disagreements between families and groups. END NOTE.)

¶8. (SBU) The three new Prefets are notable for their relative youth, as well as for their ethnic affiliations. The new Prefet of Dikhil--known as the country's "Region of Unity" for its mix of Somalis and Afars--is an ethnic Afar, but married to a Somali woman. He replaces the dean of the Prefet corps, a sixteen-year veteran and an ethnic Issa. The two new Prefets of Djibouti City and Ali Sabieh are both ethnic Issa/Ohdagop--the same subclan as Aden Robleh Awaleh, the President of the only ruling coalition partner to have publicly rejected a constitutional amendment allowing President Guellah to run for a third term (ref A). Following established practice, the Council of Ministers approved new technical advisor positions for the former Prefets of Ali Sabieh and Dikhil, within the Ministry of the Interior.

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¶9. (SBU) BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON NEW PREFET OF DIKHIL, MOHAMED CHEIKO HASSAN. (Afar/Adarassoul). A Dikhil native, Hassan began working in the Ministry of the Interior in 1980 after completing a high school education. He moved up the ranks in the Ministry, with promotions from neighborhood clerk to deputy neighborhood chief, neighborhood chief, and then Deputy Prefet of Djibouti City. In 2009, he began serving as interim Prefet of Djibouti City. Hassan is married to an ethnic Somali (Issa/Fourlaba), with whom he has six children. His father was a well-known advisor to the former Prime Minister. Hassan speaks fluent Afar, Somali, and French. He replaces former Dikhil Prefet Moussa Djama Guedi (Issa/Fourlaba), who was named Director of General Administration in the Ministry of the Interior.

¶10. (SBU) BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON NEW PREFET OF ALI-SABIEH, MOUKTAR ILTIREH WAISS. (Issa/Ohdagop). After completing studies in administration and social economy in France, Waiss served a brief stint as part of the Presidency staff before becoming an assistant to the Mayor of Djibouti in 2005. Waiss was formerly married to a French woman with whom he had two children, but is now separated; his former wife remains in France. While he has good family connections to Ali Sabieh, Waiss is seen as relatively young and inexperienced. He replaces former Ali Sabieh Prefet Ibrahim Soubaneh Rayaleh (Issa/Wardiq), who was named technical counselor to the Minister of the Interior.

¶11. (SBU) BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON NEW PREFET OF DJIBOUTI CITY, ABOUBAKER DAHER AOUALEH. (Issa/Ohdagop). Aoualeh holds a French master's degree in physics, and began his career in the Ministry of Education as a teacher of mathematics and physics at Fukuzawa middle school. He was promoted to deputy principal of Fukuzawa, and then to principal of Balbala high school in Djibouti City. In

1999 he became a member of the RPP, and campaigned for President Guelleh. He resigned from his post at Balbala high school in 2007 after a disagreement with the Minister of Education. Waiss is married with four children to Fayrouz Ahmed Houssein, the Director of Arab Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He replaces former ad interim Djibouti City Prefet Mohamed Cheiko Hassan, who was appointed Prefet of Dikhil.

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (C) While the ruling party's newsletter acerbically maligns Aden Robleh Awaleh, President Guelleh is also courting Awaleh's ethnic constituency with honey. Djibouti's carefully-balanced multi-ethnic coalition functions on the premise that each group has its own set of champions looking out for its interests at the national level. By giving two additional prominent positions to ethnic Issa/Ohdagops, Guelleh's administration may hope that the Ohdagop group will decide to stick with real benefits under the present coalition, rather than support Awaleh and try for an even greater share of the spoils. While appointing an ethnic Afar as Prefet of Dikhil makes sense in that mixed community, calculations of how to win the support of the FRUD--an ethnic-Afar party--may also have helped sway the nomination. END COMMENT.  
SWAN